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# METADISCOURSE AS RHETORICAL DEVICE IN ACADEMIC TEXTS

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## ABSTRACT

*The study examined the use of met discourse in the academic writing of Filipino writers in Applied Linguistics and Business Administration. It determined the ways advanced writers use language to make their writings organized, informative and persuasive and the factors that may account for the differences in linguistic preferences.*

*The study used the descriptive-qualitative research method. To analyze the data, Hyland's (2005) Model of Met discourse in Academic Writing, Salager-Meyer's (1997) Taxonomy of hedges, Halliday and Hasan's (1976) concept of cohesion and Samraj's (2008) classifications of citations were used. The findings revealed a higher use of Interactive met discourse than Interactional met discourse in the academic texts in both disciplines. The most frequently used are Transitions and Hedges and the least employed are Self-mentions and Frame markers. Transitions, Code glosses, and Endophoric markers were used to guide readers and make their writings coherent and informative. The use of Hedges indicates cautious writers and the low presence of Engagement markers and Self-mentions suggests objectivity. The writer's primary purpose, the writing convention policy and individual rhetorical strategy account for the differences in the writers' linguistic preferences.*

*Based on the findings, the study concludes writers use different met discourse to guide, persuade and engage with their readers. The study recommends the teaching of met discourse in the writing courses to improve students writing performance. A similar study on met discourse use in other disciplines is recommended to look into the rhetorical preferences of other writers and their ways by which they use language to guide their readers in reading their texts.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Met Discourse, Academic Texts, Rhetorical Device*

## INTRODUCTION

A considerable amount of research in academic texts such as research articles, research grant proposals, book reviews, textbooks, theses and dissertations affirm a growing interest in academic writing. In recent years, there is also a growing body of literature in professional and academic writing among non-native speakers of English in Asian countries (Arulando, 2006; Pornprapha, 2009; Simin and Tavangar, 2009;;Safnil, 2003,Zarei, G. R. and S. Mansoori. (2007, 2011). Some local studies focused on thesis and dissertation abstracts (Zafra-Tana, 2004); journalistic articles (Cabigao, 2007); sermons (Cheong, 1998); travel advisory (Alcoberes, 2010); news editorials (Dayag, 2009); application letters (Songcuan, 2009); presidential speeches ( Gonong, 2007). However, thesis or dissertation is the least explored because of its size (Swales, 1990) and inaccessibility of the texts (Paltridge, 2002). And because it is an essential

academic requirement for a higher degree, it deserves investigation.

Writing a thesis or dissertation is a difficult task among graduate students not only among ESL or EFL students but even among native speakers (Paltridge, 2002). Graduate students, regardless of native language experience difficulty in discourse-level organization and development of ideas ( Cassanave and Hubbard, 1992). Effective writing is important in academic writing to effectively communicate knowledge generated as an offshoot of research. However, effective communication is not only concerned with providing information in a text but also with ways this information are organized to facilitate reading of the texts. Metadiscourse resources serve to assist academic writers to explicitly and logically present information in a text and to guide readers in understanding the texts. Hence, knowledge of what metadiscourse to use as rhetorical strategies to structure academic discourse is important.

Writers who wish to be accepted as legitimate members of a particular disciplinary culture need to be aware of the linguistic preferences and the writing conventions of the discourse community they intend to belong (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993)

Hence, this study was conducted to examine the use of met discourse by advanced writers in soft sciences in order to make their texts comprehensible and persuasive.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

- What met discourse features are used as a rhetorical device by writers in Applied Linguistics and Business Administration to assist readers in reading and understanding their texts?

- What met discourse features are used as rhetorical strategies by writers in Applied Linguistics and Business Administration to make their texts organized, informative and persuasive?

- What factors may account for the linguistic preferences in their academic texts?

## METHODOLOGY

The study used descriptive-qualitative research method. Twenty dissertations in Applied Linguistics and Business Administration were used as data. Permissions from the institutions were secured and the corpora were selected through random and purposive sampling. Met discourse features were taken from the Introduction and Results and Discussion sections because these are the sections assumed to display a numerical preponderance of met discourse due to the argumentative and persuasive nature of the sections. Data were collected, encoded and scanned to convert them into electronic data. Met discourse features were identified, analyzed, categorized and coded independently by the researcher and two language specialist coders using predominantly Hyland's (2005) Taxonomy of Met discourse in Academic Writing and supplemented by Salager-Meyer's (1997) Taxonomy of hedges, Halliday and Hasan's ( 1976) concept of cohesion and Samraj's (2008) Classification of citations. After which validation of data was done. In the event, there were discrepancies in the categorization of met discourse, the researcher conferred with the language coders to discuss on the points of disagreement in order to arrive at a consensus on the proper categorization.

The Table below shows Hyland's model of Met discourse.

**Table 1: Hyland's (2005) Model of Metadiscourse in Academic Writing**

| Category | Function | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Interactive Resources | Help to guide reader through the text | |
| Transitions | Express semantic relations between main clauses | In addition, but, thus, and |
| Frame markers | Refer to discourse acts, sequences or text stages | Finally, to conclude, my purpose here is |
| Endophoric markers | Refer to information in other parts of the texts | Noted above, See figure in section 2 |
| Evidentials | Refer to source of information from other texts | According to x, ( Y, 1990), Z states that |
| Code glosses | Help readers grasp functions of ideational material | Namely, e.g., such as in other words |
| Interactional resources | Involve the reader in the argument | |
| Hedges | Withhold writer's full commitment to proposition | Might, perhaps, possible, about |
| Boosters | Emphasize force or writer's certainty in proposition | In fact, definitely, it is clear that |
| Attitude markers | Express writer's attitude to proposition | Unfortunately, surprisingly, I agree |
| Engagement markers | Explicitly refer to or build relationship with reader | Consider, note that, you can see that |
| Self mentions | Explicit reference to authors | I, we, my, our |

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 2 below shows the Summary of Metadiscourse (MD) in Applied Linguistics and Business Administration. The figure reveals that Interactive metadiscourse was employed more than twice the Interactional met discourse with a total of 1,421 or 61.4% occurrence compared to 893 or 38.6% occurrence of Interactional met discourse. The three most commonly used Interactive met discourse are *Transitions, Evidentials* and *Code glosses*. Of the Interactive met discourse, *Transition*s recorded the highest frequency showing a total of 775 or 33.% in Applied Linguistics and 401 or 28.2% in Business Administration comprising about one-third of the total number of met discourse resources.

**Table 2 Total Occurrences and Percentage of Interactive and Interactional Met Discourse in Applied Linguistics and Business Administration**

| Met Discourse Category | Code | Applied Linguistics | | Business Administration | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Interactive | | | % | | % |
| 1.Transition | Tr | 775 | 33.7. | 401 | 28.2 |
| 2.Evidentials | Ev | 628 | 27.3 | 333 | 23.5 |
| 3.Endophoric markers | End | 213 | 9.3 | 149 | 10.5 |
| 4.Frame markers | Fm | 123 | 5.3 | 167 | 11.8 |
| 5.Code glosses | Cg | 562 | 24.4 | 371 | 26.1 |
| Total MD | | 2,301 | 63.9 | 1,421 | 61.4 |
| Interactional | | | % | | % |
| 1.Hedges | He | 953 | 73.4 | 559 | 62.6 |
| 2.Boosters | Bo | 132 | 9.5 | 43 | 4.8 |
| 3.Attitude markers | Am | 129 | 9.9 | 124 | 13.9 |
| 4.Engagement markers | Eng | 66 | 5.1 | 153 | 17.1 |
| 5. Selfmentions | Sm | 18 | 1.4 | 14 | 1.6 |
| **Total MD** | | **1,298** | **36.1** | **893** | **38.6** |
| **Over all Total MD** | | **3,599** | | **2,314** | |
| **Total No. of Words** | | **98,104** | | **45,453** | |

This was followed by *Evidentials* and *Code glosses* in both disciplines. The least employed is the *Frame markers* in Applied Linguistics with 5.3% or 123 occurrences and the *Endophoric markers* in Business Administration with 10.5% or 149 occurrences. The predominance of *Transition*s is probably due to the discursive nature of the dissertations particularly in Applied Linguistics as evidenced by the numerical abundance of words in the texts. The length of the texts necessitates the use of *Transitions* to indicate relationships of ideas. Transitions used were adverbial phrases and conjunctions which are classified into contrastive /comparative, additive, causal and temporal (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). Mohammed and Omer (2000) classify contrastive, causal and temporal as non-additive conjunctions. Contrastive conjunctions indicate contrary to expectations. Additive relations usually relate coordinate elements; causal relations suggest result, effect or reason while temporal refers to the sequence in time (Halliday and Hasan, 1976).

The study reveals that contrastive/comparative conjunctions were the most widely employed in the texts which were followed by causal, additive and temporal conjunctions. On the basis of the result, it can be said that writers are basically non-additive in argumentative texts. Because of the nature of the arguments, that is to provide the comparison between the findings of the current work and that of others, the comparative/contrastive conjunctive relations appear to dominate the texts. Similarly, analyses of outcomes, interpretation of results, as well as tracing the causes or possible reasons for the existence of certain conditions are part of the argumentation. Hence, this explains the high occurrence of causal conjunctions. Signposts such as the contrastive, causative, additive or temporal conjunctions help the readers see the connections of ideas, thus facilitating the easy understanding of the texts. Besides, the writers presumably believe that the imagined readers, though are specialists in the same field of interest, need to be properly guided as to the organization of the texts.

The presence of *Evidentials* displays the amount of readings the author has indicating a well-informed writer, thus increasing author credibility and text persuasiveness. The extensive use of metadiscourse also shows the relatedness of the research with other works in the field thereby foregrounding the novelty of the current research and its significant contributions to the already existing repository of knowledge. This suggests that Filipino writers may have realized the need to cite other works in order to build and support arguments and to display profound knowledge on the current work in order to establish integrity and credibility among a host of scientists pursuing the same interests. It cannot be ignored that the presence of numerous citations demonstrates the writers' amount of readings done in the disciplinary field which adds persuasiveness of the texts.

Analysis of Evidentials reveals that writers in Applied Linguistics gave the most prominence to the authors of other works with 297 or 48.85% by using integral citations. In integral citations, authors are placed in subject position while in non-integral citations authors of previous studies are not foregrounded and are not given textual prominence.

The other most commonly used Interactive metadiscourse is *Code glosses*. Code glosses serve to furnish additional information, clarify concepts, define terms, provide explanations or give illustrations or exemplifications. These are commonly employed to satisfy the readers' need for understanding information in the texts. It can be inferred that writers make the assessment of what the readers already know and what they may not know indicating the writers' sensitivity to the reader's need to be clarified of some technical concepts. The high visibility of *Code glosses* shows the writers' primordial concern, that is, to guide the readers in understanding concepts through definitions, illustrations, exemplifications and the like. The numerical preponderance of the Interactive metadiscourse reveals the writers' purpose of communicating information coherently, informatively and persuasively as revealed by the numerical abundance of

*Transitions, Code glosses,* and *Evidentials* in the texts.

Lastly, the least used Interactive metadiscourse is *Frame markers. Frame markers* function to signal text boundaries, label text stages, announce discourse goals and shift arguments (Hyland, 2005). The length of the discourse necessitates the signaling of boundaries from time to time to guide the reader in text navigation. In Business Administration, these were generally employed to provide listings.

On the other hand, the most frequently used Interactional metadiscourse in both disciplines is *Hedges* comprising more than half of the total number of metadiscourse. It can be noted that *Hedges* indicates the writer's commitment to the text revealing a more cautious writer. It functions to convey tentativeness and uncertainty to avoid or reduce the risks of opposition in the event contradicting results arise (Salager-Meyer, 1997). Moderately employed are the *Boosters*, *Engagement markers,* and *Attitude markers* while the least employed were the *Self-mentions* with 18 or 1.4% occurrence in Applied Linguistics and 14 or 1.6% occurrence in Business Administration. The less visibility of *Self-mentions* in both disciplines indicates the writers' desire to project objectivity and formality as exemplified by the expressions such as *the author, the researcher, the proponent of this study.*

In Business Administration, *Engagement markers* recorded a remarkable number with 17.1% or 153 occurrences compared to 66 occurrences or 5.1% in Applied Linguistics. *Engagement markers* in Business Administration take the form mostly of directives or imperative statements and the use of modals such as *Note that in this model…, Consider the following issues…, It should be noted that…*

Generally, the low frequency *of Self-mentions, Engagement markers and Attitude* markers in both disciplines suggests that Filipino writers practice objectivity in academic writing where opinions and assertions with emotional tone have no place.

The use of metadiscourse is influenced by the individual writer's linguistic preferences or rhetorical strategies as exemplified by the use of imperatives and statements with modals in Business Administration. Rhetorical strategy refers to the lexical choices the writer makes to communicate effectively to the readers. Furthermore, some disciplinary fields may have allowed the certain degree of freedom in the ways academic reports are written, thus explains the divergence of use. It can also be said that writing conventions and instructions passed on in tertiary institutions seem to be a factor in how research reports should be written and presented. Lastly and more importantly, the primary purpose of the writer influences lexical choices as evidenced by the numerical predominance of Interactive metadiscourse in various disciplines.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

Based on the above findings of the study, the following conclusions are formulated:

- Met discourse use reveals the ways writers from various disciplines make language choices to guide their readers in understanding the text, persuade them to accept their assertions, and increase text credibility.

- Transitions and frame markers are used by writers to make their texts coherent and organized, endophoric markers and code glosses, to make texts informative, and Evidentials to make texts persuasive. Interactive met discourse is the met discourse resources used by writers to guide readers in reading the texts.

- Met discourse use can be constrained by the writers' purpose, the writing convention policy of the academic community, individual rhetorical strategy and the writing instructions in tertiary institutions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and foregoing conclusions, the following are the recommendations:

- The teaching of Research subjects and writing courses especially in the undergraduate must integrate the concept of met discourse to improve writing performance.

- A similar inquiry in  other disciplinary fields and other persuasive texts be conducted to look into the met discourse preferences and lexical choices writers make to present a more comprehensible and persuasive discourse.

- A similar study on met discourse use in theses or dissertations using a larger data to analyze in order to validate the findings of the present study and to come up with a more conclusive generalization.

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